CLAIMS

5 We claim:

1. In a vehicle comprising a first device and a second device, the first device and the second device being communicatively coupled by an active network, a data packet for communication of data between the first device and the second device, the data packet comprising a header portion, a data portion, a trailer portion and an active

10 portion.

2. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the active portion provides active data related to the configuration of the active network.

15 3. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the active portion provides active data related to the operation of one of the first device and the second device.

4. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the active portion is integrated with the header portion.

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5. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the active portion is integrated with the data portion.

6. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the active portion is integrated with the

25 trailer portion.

7. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the active network comprises a plurality of active network elements coupled by connection media, and wherein the active portion contains active data related to the configuration of the active network elements.

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8. The vehicle of claim 7, wherein the active portion represents a state of an active network element of the plurality of active network elements and wherein the active network is operable to communicate the data packet corresponding to the state.

9. The vehicle of claim 7, wherein at least one of the active network elements

10 comprises a switch.

10. The vehicle of claim 7, wherein at least one of the active network elements comprises a bridge.

15 11. The vehicle of claim 7, wherein at least one of the active network elements comprises a router.

12. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the active portion contains active network timing information.

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13. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the active portion represents a packet state and wherein the active network is operable to communicate the data packet corresponding to the packet state.

14. The vehicle of claim 13, wherein the packet state represents a priority state.

15. The vehicle of claim 13, wherein the packet state represents an error state.

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16. The vehicle of claim 13, wherein the packet state represents a normal state.

17. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the active portion comprises information relating to the data packet origin.

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18. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the active portion comprises a receipt acknowledgement message.